

Signpost

Kateri Circles Vol. 6 Issue 8

August



St. Tekakwitha Opening prayer:

God of all nations and peoples. You have filled Your Creation with

Your mighty presence. Through Your handiwork You speak to our heard words that satisfy our every desire.

You called Your servant the Mohawk maiden Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ to do Your will and to serve others with the gifts You gave her.

May she who held tight to the cross of Your Son through her short life marred by sickness, suffering and persecution, be our intercessor during our own trials. May her embrace of the Catholic faith and her openness to sharing Jesus with others inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples.

Amen

Who do we need to bring in the circle?

Who do we need to pray for:

Family members who are sick. Family members who have died. Struggles that we are facing.

Let us bring our joys and sufferings into this circle.

Direction:

Summer

South

White

Sin - rage/anger/lust

Fruits of the Holy Spirit - Patience/Peace/Self-control

Gifts of the Holy Spirit - Wisdom/Knowledge

Topic:

Pastoral Framework

Part One: A Call for Healing

A History of Trauma

The history of Indigenous Peoples in the United States of America is punctuated by trauma. Before the arrival of Europeans in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the American continent was inhabited by Indigenous People. For millennia, this was their home.¹ Among the most significant sources of trauma are epidemics, national policies, and Native boarding schools, which stand out because of their profound effect on family life. The family systems of many Indigenous Peoples never fully recovered from these tragedies, which often led to broken homes harmed by addiction, domestic abuse, abandonment, and neglect. The Church recognizes that it has played a part in traumas experienced by Native children.

People from Europe and Asia unknowingly brought with them viruses and bacteria to which Indigenous communities had no natural or acquired immunity. Many Indigenous communities were brought to the brink of extinction, and in some cases were actually made extinct, by the ensuing epidemics. We may never know the extent of the loss of population, but historians estimate that epidemics claimed the lives of nearly 80 to 90 percent of the Indigenous population throughout the Americas, especially in the first 150 years after the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas.² In some regions, entire families and villages were wiped out. Those

¹ During the Colonial Period the conquest and occupation of North America by the great European powers-England, Spain, France, and the Netherlands- devastated and defrauded the Native population through disease, warfare, land dispossession, trader fraud, relocation, and murder. See Scott Weidensaul, *The First Frontier*, Harper, 2002.

² See Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian, "The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 163-188, doi.org/10.1257/jep.24.2.163.

who remained often had to pick up the pieces of their way of life without intact family and tribal systems to rely on. Missionaries who shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ sought to support the Indigenous communities amid this devastating trauma.

The government of the newly founded United States of America established initiatives detrimental to the Indigenous families; some of these policies forced many Indigenous Peoples to relocate to reservations. Sadly, these actions exterminated many Indigenous communities. In other communities, forced relocation disrupted an established way of life. For cultures based on fishing, land cultivation, and hunting, this new way of life—dependent on government subsidies for food and other resources—resulted in losses of meaning and purpose. These profound changes often contributed to depression, addiction, and further breakdowns of the family unit.

Regrettably, European and Eurocentric world powers—exploiting language from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century papal letters known as “bulls”—developed their own justifications to enslave, mistreat, and remove Indigenous Peoples from their lands. These ideologies—that is, the legal and political systems and related practices that developed from them—are collectively known as the “doctrine of discovery.”

Let us be very clear here: the Catholic Church does not espouse these ideologies. The Vatican Dicastries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development emphasize that the “Church’s magisterium upholds the respect due to every human being. The Catholic Church therefore repudiates those concepts that fail to recognize the inherent human rights of Indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political “doctrine of discovery.” In a joint 2023 statement, the dicasteries clearly state:

The “doctrine of discovery” is not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church. Historical research clearly demonstrates that the papal documents in question, written in a specific historical period and linked to political questions, have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith. At the same time, the Church acknowledges that these papal bulls did

not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of indigenous peoples. The Church is also aware that the contents of these documents were manipulated for political purposes by competing colonial powers in order to justify immoral acts against indigenous peoples that were carried out, at times, without opposition from ecclesiastical authorities. It is only just to recognize these errors, acknowledge the terrible effects of the assimilation policies and the pain experienced by indigenous peoples, and ask for pardon. Furthermore, Pope Francis has urged: “Never again can the Christian community allow itself to be infected by the idea that one culture is superior to others, or that it is legitimate to employ ways of coercing others.”³

The experiences and histories of different countries and different Indigenous peoples are distinct, but in the broader discussion of the “doctrine of discovery” lies a unique opportunity for constructive dialogue and a collaborative pathway to discuss important issues concerning Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. This collaboration represents an important way to find a peaceful path forward, especially when we address different historical methods of forced assimilation.

In the United States, forced removals to reservations were followed by policies of cultural assimilation, in which the government of the United States attempted to force Tribes to conform to the dominant American culture. Through its Bureau of Indian Affairs, the government established more than 400⁴ boarding schools across the United States and forced many Indigenous children to attend them. In these schools, Indigenous children were forced to abandon their traditional languages, dress, and customs.

³ Dicastries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Joint Statement*, no. 6.

⁴ The total number of Native Boarding Schools in United States during the Boarding School Period (1819-1979) is estimated to be 408. During that period, there were a total of 84 Boarding Schools run by Catholic religious communities or Church entities, according to the website <https://ctah.archivistsacwr.org/>. Of those, the number of Boarding Schools that were entrusted by the federal government to Catholic church groups is estimated to be much lower, since a good number of them were created for assistance and educational purposes to poor and marginalized communities, outside of the government programs, and were funded by religious communities and their benefactors. Also, federal funding for Catholic Boarding Schools ended in the early 1900's.

Boarding schools were seen as one expedient means to achieve this cultural assimilation because they separated Indigenous children from their families and Tribes and “Americanized” them while they were still malleable. However, not every boarding school was founded and operated for these purposes. In Alaska, for example, many Church-run boarding schools were created to shelter youth who were orphaned during epidemics or whose parents were experiencing illness or dire poverty and could not care for them.

Many Native alumni of those boarding schools who are still living today express gratitude for the care and educational opportunities they received from the men and women religious who administered mission schools. Many of these alumni used that formal education to launch successful careers and move into leadership positions across diverse fields. Regardless of the individual experiences at boarding schools, however, the system itself left a legacy of community and individual trauma that broke down family and support systems among Indigenous communities.

These multigenerational traumas continue to have an impact today, one that is perpetuated by racism and neglect of all kinds. Through our listening sessions, we heard that many Indigenous people feel unaccepted by and unwelcomed in society and even the Church. Further, Indigenous peoples still suffer disrespect and neglect within the larger U.S. society. It is no surprise, then, that historical trauma, systematic destruction of the Indigenous family, socioeconomic systems that perpetuate poverty in reservations, and a general lack of good educational opportunities all have led to extremely high rates of addiction and suicide among Native Americans even today. Of particular concern are Native youth and young adults, who register the highest rates of suicide among people of their age.

Commentary

From the introduction, the document addresses some of the greatest challenges facing Catholic Natives and Natives in general. The document addressed not only historical trauma, but the way in which that trauma can debilitate Native communities. The underlying consequences of not only the devastating loss of population, but also the willful destruction and of Native cultures is the resilience of Native cultures and peoples. This resilience, spirit and strength is an example not only to the Catholic Church in the U.S. but also the world.

Although we celebrate that resilience, we also do not minimize or diminish the role of the Church in Native historical trauma and especially the assaults on the Native cultures. In this way, the document seeks to use the Native strength of resilience to fortify faith and the spiritual lives of Native Catholics without diminishing the Church's culpability in the need for Native communities to develop the strong virtue of resilience.

Further, this section touches on the devastating consequences of trauma within the Native communities and what can be done is discussed further in the document. However, the vibrancy and vitality of Native cultures is not limited to the consequences of trauma. Native cultures have the foundation of faith and spirituality which is the foundation of their ability to transcend historical trauma and devastations.

Last, this first part of the Pastoral Framework addresses that the response to historical trauma is not limited to Native communities themselves, but because the larger society had a hand to play in perpetuating these historical traumas, they also have a responsibility to develop ways to address the consequences.

Discussion Questions for this section of the Pastoral Framework:

- 1) What are the challenges facing Native communities?
- 2) Why does historical trauma cause problems for Native communities?
- 3) What are the causes of historical trauma?
- 4) What can be done to counteract the ways historical trauma harms Native communities?

Discussion Questions for the Church and Indian Country Podcast:

<https://youtu.be/2sPwJ41sog?si=kPW1pt9U9IMDTmJO>

Native Hawaiians

- 1) What is the difference between Native Hawaiians and the Natives in the rest of the country?
- 2) What are the similarities?
- 3) One of the most important concern with Native Hawaiians is preserving the language. Why is preserving Native language important to preserving Native cultures?

4) In the two summits for Native Hawaiians, they have expressed the need for Native empowerment within the Diocese. How can this be done in your local Native Tribe or Native culture?

Closing prayer:

From the Black and Indian Mission Office:

God of all nations and peoples. You have filled your creation with Your mighty presence. Through Your handiwork You speak to our hearts words that satisfy our every desire.

You called Your servant, the Mohawk maiden Saint Kateri Tekakwitha to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ, to do Your will and to serve others with the gifts You gave her.

May she who held tight to the cross of Your Son throughout her short life marked by sickness, suffering, and persecution, be our intercessor during our own trials. May her embrace of the Catholic faith and her openness to sharing Jesus with others inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples. May she who sought our Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament lead up to similar reverences for the Eucharist so that, like Saint Kateri, our last words may be, “Jesus, I love You.” Amen.

Notice:

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Rev. Mike Carson